



*The Public Service Commission  
State of South Carolina*

Charles L.A. Terreni  
Chief Clerk/Administrator  
Phone: (803) 896-5133  
Fax: (803) 896-5246

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Phone: (803) 896-5100  
Fax: (803) 896-5246

October 5, 2005

Certified Mail  
Return Receipt Requested

Bonnie D. Shealy, Esquire  
Robinson McFadden & Moore, PC  
P. O. Box 944  
Columbia, SC 29202

C. Lessie Hammonds  
Office of Regulatory Staff  
P.O. Box 11263  
Columbia, SC 29211

Re: Application of Acceris Management and Acquisition, LLC  
Commission Docket No. 2005-189-C  
Corrected Hearing Examiner's Order

Dear Bonnie and Lessie:

I am in receipt of your proposed corrections and modifications to the proposed Hearing Examiner's Order in the above-captioned matter, and, as indicated by our exchange of e-mails, I had no difficulty in accepting your proposals. Enclosed is a corrected Hearing Examiner's Order in the above-captioned matter which includes your suggestions, and, unless I hear otherwise from you, I intend to submit it for Commission approval and adoption at the Commission meeting of October 11, 2005.

Thank you in advance for your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

F. David Butler  
Hearing Examiner

FDB:dd

cc: Joseph Melchers, Chief Legal Advisor

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BEFORE  
THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION OF  
SOUTH CAROLINA  
DOCKET NO. 2005-189-C - ORDER NO. 2005-  
OCTOBER 5, 2005

IN RE: Application of Acceris Management and Acquisition, LLC for a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity to Provide Interexchange Telecommunications Services; for Alternative Regulation, and for Authority to Acquire Certain Assets of Acceris Communications Corp.	) ORDER GRANTING CERTIFICATE, APPROVING MODIFIED ALTERNATIVE REGULATION AND APPROVING SALE OF ASSETS-ORDER OF THE HEARING EXAMINER
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This matter comes before the Public Service Commission of South Carolina (the “Commission”) by way of the Application of Acceris Management and Acquisition, LLC (“Acceris Management” or the “Company”) requesting a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity authorizing it to provide interexchange telecommunications services within the State of South Carolina, and for authority to acquire certain assets of Acceris Communications Corp. (“Acceris Communications”). The Company’s Application was filed pursuant to S.C. Code Ann. §58-9-280 (Supp. 2004) and the general regulatory authority of the Commission. By its Application, Acceris Management also requests modified alternative regulation of its business services offerings identical to that granted to AT&T Communications in Order Nos. 95-1734 and 96-55 in Docket No.

95-661-C as modified by Order No. 2001-997, and requests waiver of certain Commission regulations.

The Commission's Docketing Department instructed Acceris Management to publish, one time, a Notice of Filing in newspapers of general circulation in the areas of the State affected by the Application. The purpose of the Notice of Filing was to inform interested parties of the Application of Acceris Management and of the manner and time in which to file the appropriate pleadings for participation in the proceeding. Acceris Management complied with this instruction and provided the Commission with proof of publication of the Notice of Filing. No Petitions to Intervene or Protests were filed.

A hearing was convened on September 26, 2005, at 11:00 a.m. in the Commission's Meeting Room before David Butler, Hearing Examiner. Acceris Management was represented by Bonnie Shealy, Esquire. The Office of Regulatory Staff (ORS) was represented by C. Lessie Hammonds, Esquire.

Drew S. Backstrand, General Counsel of the Company, appeared and testified in support of the Application. The record reveals that Acceris Management is incorporated in Minnesota as a limited liability company and registered to transact business in South Carolina as a foreign corporation. According to Mr. Backstrand, Acceris Management proposes to operate as a reseller of intrastate interexchange telecommunications services to the public on a statewide basis and to offer a full range of "1+" interexchange telecommunications services on a resale basis. Specifically, Acceris Management seeks authority to provide MTS, out-WATS, in-WATS, and calling card services to both business and residential customers. The Company does not intend to offer prepaid card

services in South Carolina. The Company also intends to offer VoIP service to South Carolina consumers and businesses.

Acceris Management's services will be offered twenty-four hours per day, seven days a week. It intends to market its services in South Carolina via its website or direct inquiries to obtain services. Mr. Backstrand explained the Company's request for authority, and the record further reveals the Company's services, operations, and marketing procedures.

Mr. Backstrand also discussed Acceris Management's technical, financial, and managerial resources to provide the services for which it seeks authority to provide. Mr. Backstrand offered that Acceris Management possesses sufficient financial resources to support its operations in South Carolina. Acceris Management's parent company, North Central Equity LLC, has invested over \$10 million in debt along with certain accredited investors and a venture capital firm for the purchase of the Acceris Communications Corp.'s assets. With regard to management and technical capabilities, the Company has not been denied a license in any of the states in which it has applied, has had no licenses revoked in any jurisdictions, nor has it been the subject of any investigations by any governmental regulatory agencies. The Company's Application and Mr. Backstrand's testimony both evidence that Acceris Management's management team has extensive experience in both marketing and communications. Mr. Backstrand also testified that Acceris Management will operate in accordance with Commission rules, regulations, guidelines, and Commission Orders.

Mr. Backstrand offered that approval of Acceris Management's Application would serve the public interest by increasing the level of long distance competition in South Carolina, by providing a high-quality alternative of long distance service, and by increasing consumer awareness of options and services available, thus encouraging the growth and success of competitive services. Mr. Backstrand, on behalf of the Company, requests a waiver of 26 S.C. Code Ann. Regs.103-610 and to be allowed to keep the Company's books at its headquarters. Further, the Company requests an exemption from record keeping policies that require maintenance of financial records in conformance with the Uniform System of Accounts (USOA). Acceris Management maintains its books in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP).

With regard to the proposed asset transfer, Acceris Communications Corp. and Acceris Management have signed an Asset Purchase Agreement in which Acceris Communications agreed to sell to Acceris Management all of its telecommunications assets, including but not limited to (1) all PUC/PSC/FCC licenses, CPCNs and tariffs authorizing ACC to provide telecommunications services in all relevant states to the extent assignable or transferable; and (2) the customer base; and (3) all other assets specified in the Asset Purchase Agreement. Acceris Management will obtain the customer base and all telecommunications assets and operations of Acceris Communications in the State of South Carolina and all other states in which Acceris Communications operates. In addition, Mr. Backstrand stated that as part of the asset purchase agreement, Acceris Management assumed certain Assumed Liabilities of

Acceris Communications Corp. as described in the asset purchase agreement of the parties.

After the asset purchase agreement is finalized, Mr. Backstrand notes that all telecommunications services in South Carolina currently provided by Acceris Communications will be provided by Acceris Management. The transition will be seamless. The South Carolina customers have been notified of the pending transfer.

After full consideration of the applicable law, the Company's Application, and the evidence presented at the hearing, the Commission hereby issues its findings of fact and conclusions of law:

**FINDINGS OF FACT**

1. Acceris Management is organized as a corporation under the laws of the State of Minnesota as a limited liability company and is authorized to do business as a foreign corporation in the State of South Carolina by the Secretary of State.
2. Acceris Management has no reported record of violations of regulatory laws or regulations in the jurisdictions in which it is currently operating.
3. Acceris Management desires to operate as a reseller of interexchange telecommunications services in South Carolina.
4. We find that Acceris Management possesses the managerial experience and capability to operate as a non-facilities based reseller of interexchange services in South Carolina.

5. We find, based on the financial records and balance sheets submitted by the Company, that Acceris Management possesses sufficient financial resources to provide the services as described in its Application.

6. We find that the issuance of a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity to Acceris Management to operate as a reseller of interexchange telecommunications services in South Carolina would be in the best interest of the citizens of South Carolina by increasing the level of long distance competition in South Carolina, by providing an alternative of long distance service, and by increasing consumer awareness of options and services available, thereby encouraging growth and success of competitive services.

7. Acceris Management has no plans to maintain offices in South Carolina and requests a waiver of 26 S.C. Code Regs. 103-610. The Commission finds Acceris Management's requested waiver reasonable and understands the difficulty presented to Acceris Management should the waiver not be granted. Further, we find that a waiver of 26 S.C. Code Regs. 103-610 to be in the public interest. We also believe that exemption from the policies that would require the Company to keep its records under the USOA is reasonable.

8. The transfer of assets from Acceris Telecommunications to Acceris Management should be approved.

**CONCLUSIONS OF LAW**

1. The Commission concludes that Acceris Management possesses the managerial, technical, and financial resources to provide the interexchange telecommunications services as described in its application.

2. The Commission concludes that Acceris Management will participate in the support of universally available telephone service at affordable rates to the extent that Acceris may be required to do so by the Commission.

3. The Commission concludes that Acceris Management will provide services which will meet the service standards of the Commission.

4. The Commission concludes that approval of Acceris Management's Application to provide intrastate interexchange telecommunications services within South Carolina will serve the public interest by enhancing competition in the State of South Carolina by offering additional service offerings to South Carolina's consumers and by providing for efficient use of existing telecommunications resources.

5. The Commission concludes that the provision of interexchange telecommunications service by Acceris Management will not adversely impact the public interest.

6. The Commission concludes that the issuance of the authority to provide intrastate interexchange telecommunications services as requested by Acceris Management and as set forth in its Application, is in the best interests of the citizens of the State of South Carolina.



7. The Commission concludes that a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity should be granted to Acceris Management to provide intrastate interexchange service via resale.

8. The Commission concludes that Acceris Management's intrastate interexchange business telecommunications services shall be regulated in accordance with the principles and procedures established for alternative regulation of business service offerings set out in Order Nos. 95-1734 and 96-55 in Docket No. 95-661-C. The Commission has previously granted this "alternative regulation" to competitive intrastate interexchange carriers operating within South Carolina, and the Commission concludes that the competitive marketplace requires the Commission to allow this flexible regulation to those carriers which request it. Specifically, the Commission-approved alternative regulation allows business service offerings, including consumer card services and operator services, to be subject to a relaxed regulatory scheme identical to that granted to AT&T Communications in Order Nos. 95-1734 and 96-55 in Docket No. 95-661-C. However, pursuant to Order No. 2001-997 (Docket No. 2000-407-C), this Commission has modified alternative regulation by the re-imposition of rate caps with regard to certain "operator-assisted calls" where a customer uses a local exchange carrier's calling card to complete calls from locations which have not selected that local exchange carrier as the toll provider. Order No. 2001-997, dated November 8, 2001, imposed a maximum cap of \$1.75 for operator surcharges for such calls, and a maximum cap of \$0.35 related to the flat per-minute rate associated with these calls. Under this relaxed regulatory scheme, tariff filings for business services shall be presumed valid

upon filing. The Commission will have seven (7) days in which to institute an investigation of any tariff filing. If the Commission institutes an investigation of a particular tariff filing within the seven days, the tariff filing will then be suspended until further Order of the Commission.

9. We conclude that Acceris Management's request for waiver of 26 S.C. Code Regs. 103-610 should be granted as strict compliance with the regulation would cause undue hardship on Acceris Management. We also grant exemption from the policies requiring the use of USOA.

10. We conclude that the transfer of assets from Acceris Communications to Acceris Management should be approved.

IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED, ADJUDGED, AND DECREED THAT:

1. A Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity should be granted to Acceris Management to provide intrastate interLATA service and to originate and terminate toll traffic within the same LATA, as set forth herein, through the resale of intrastate Wide Area Telecommunications Services (WATS), Message Telecommunications Service (MTS), Foreign Exchange Service, Private Line Service, or any other services authorized for resale by tariffs of carriers approved by the Commission.

2. The Commission adopts a rate design for Acceris Management for its resale of residential services which includes only maximum rate levels for each tariff charge. A rate structure incorporating maximum rate levels with the flexibility for adjustment below the maximum rate levels has been previously adopted by the

Commission. In Re: Application of GTE Sprint Communications Corporation, etc., Order No. 84-622, issued in Docket No. 84-10-C (August 2, 1984).

3. Acceris Management shall not adjust its residential rates below the approved maximum level without notice to the Commission and to the public. Acceris Management shall file its proposed rate changes, publish its notice of such changes, and file affidavits of publication with the Commission two weeks prior to the effective date of the changes. However, the public notice requirement is waived, and therefore not required, for reductions below the maximum cap in instances which do not affect the general body of subscribers or do not constitute a general rate reduction. In Re: Application of GTE Sprint Communications, etc., Order No. 93-638, issued in Docket No. 84-10-C (July 16, 1993). Any proposed increase in the maximum rate level for residential services reflected in the tariff which would be applicable to the general body of the Company's subscribers shall constitute a general ratemaking proceeding and will be treated in accordance with the notice and hearing provisions of S.C. Code Ann. §58-9-540 (Supp. 2004).

4. With respect to Acceris Management's business services, consumer card, and operator service offerings, the Commission adopts a relaxed regulatory scheme identical to that granted to AT&T Communications in Order Nos. 95-1734 and 96-55 in Docket No. 95-661-C. Under this relaxed regulatory scheme, tariff filings for business services shall be presumed valid upon filing. The Commission will have seven (7) days in which to institute an investigation of any tariff filing. If the Commission institutes an investigation of a particular tariff filing within the seven days, the tariff filing will then be

suspended until further Order of the Commission. Any relaxation in the future reporting requirements that may be adopted for AT&T shall apply to Acceris Management also. These alternative regulation orders were modified by Order No. 2001-997 in Docket No. 2000-407-C which imposed a cap on operator-assisted calls where a consumer uses a local exchange carrier's calling card to complete calls from locations which have not selected the local exchange carrier as their toll provider.

Pursuant to Order No. 2001-997, this Commission modified the alternative regulation by the re-imposition of rate caps with regard to certain operator assisted calls where a customer uses a local exchange carrier's calling card to complete calls from locations which have not selected that local exchange carrier as the toll provider. Order No. 2001-997, dated November 8, 2001, imposed a minimum cap of \$1.75 for operator surcharges for such calls, and a maximum cap of \$0.35 related to the flat per-minute rate associated with these calls. The re-imposition of rate caps for certain operator assisted calls has led to alternative regulation now being known as "modified alternative regulation." The provisions of Order No. 2001-997 and the modification contained therein also apply to Acceris Management.

5. If it has not already done so by the date of issuance of this Order, Acceris Management shall file its revised tariff and an accompanying price list within thirty (30) days of receipt of this Order. The revised tariff shall be consistent with the findings of this Order, shall be consistent with the Commission's Rules and Regulations, and shall include any modifications agreed upon with the Office of Regulatory Staff.

6. Acceris Management is subject to access charges pursuant to Commission Order No. 86-584, in which the Commission determined that for access purposes resellers and facilities-based interexchange carriers should be treated similarly.

7. With regard to the Company's resale of service, an end-user should be able to access another interexchange carrier or operator service provider if the end-user so desires.

8. Acceris Management shall resell the services of only those interexchange carriers or LECs authorized to do business in South Carolina by this Commission. If Acceris Management changes underlying carriers, it shall notify the Commission in writing.

9. With regard to the origination and termination of toll calls within the same LATA, Acceris Management shall comply with the terms of Order No. 93-462, Order Approving Stipulation and Agreement, in Docket Nos. 92-182-C, 92-183-C, and 92-200-C (June 3, 1993), with the exception of the 10-XXX intraLATA dialing requirement, which has been rendered obsolete by the toll dialing parity rules established by the FCC pursuant to the Telecommunications Act of 1996 (See, 47 CFR 51.209). Specifically, Acceris Management shall comply with the imputation standard as adopted by Order No. 93-462 and more fully described in paragraph 4 of the Stipulation and Appendix B approved by Order No. 93-462.

10. Acceris Management shall file annual financial information in the form of annual reports and gross receipts reports as required by the Commission. The annual report and the gross receipt report will necessitate the filing of intrastate information.

Therefore, Acceris Management shall keep financial records on an intrastate basis for South Carolina to comply with the annual report and gross receipts filings. The proper form for filing annual financial information can be found at the Commission's website at [www.psc.state.sc.us/reference/forms.asp](http://www.psc.state.sc.us/reference/forms.asp). The title of this form is "Annual Report for Interexchange Companies." This form shall be utilized by the Company to file annual financial information with the Commission and ORS and shall be filed no later than **April 1<sup>st</sup>**.

Commission gross receipts forms are due to be filed with the Commission and ORS no later than **August 31<sup>st</sup>** of each year. The proper form for filing gross receipts information can be found at the Commission's website at [www.psc.state.sc.us/reference/forms.asp](http://www.psc.state.sc.us/reference/forms.asp), and the appropriate form is entitled "Gross Receipts for Utility Companies."

11. The Company shall, in compliance with Commission regulations, designate and maintain an authorized utility representative who is prepared to discuss, on a regulatory level, customer relations (complaint) matters, engineering operations, tests and repairs. In addition, the Company shall provide to the Commission and ORS in writing the name of the authorized representative to be contacted in connection with general management duties as well as emergencies which occur during non-office hours. Acceris shall file the names, addresses and telephone numbers of these representatives with the Commission within thirty (30) days of receipt of this Order. The "Authorized Utility Representative Information" form can be found at the Commission's website at [www.psc.state.sc.us/reference/forms.asp](http://www.psc.state.sc.us/reference/forms.asp); this form shall be utilized for the provision of

this information to the Commission and ORS. Further, the Company shall promptly notify the Commission and ORS in writing if the representatives are replaced.

12. The Company is directed to comply with all Rules and Regulations of the Commission, unless a regulation is specifically waived by the Commission.

13. At the hearing, Acceris Management requested a waiver of 26 Code Regs. 103-610 (Supp. 2004), which requires that records required by the Commission's Rules and Regulations be maintained in South Carolina. The record reveals that Acceris Management's principal headquarters will be located outside of South Carolina. Acceris Management requests permission to maintain its books and records at its headquarters in its home office. The Commission finds Acceris Management's requested waiver reasonable and understands the difficulty presented to Acceris Management should the waiver not be granted. The Commission therefore grants the requested waiver that Acceris Management be allowed to maintain its books and records at its principal headquarters. However, Acceris Management shall make available its books and records at all reasonable times upon request by the Commission or the Commission Staff, and Acceris Management shall promptly notify the Commission if the location of its books and records changes.

14. Acceris Management also requests that it be exempt from record keeping policies that require a carrier to maintain its financial records in conformance with the Uniform System of Accounts (USOA). The USOA was developed by the FCC as a means of regulating telecommunications companies subject to rate base regulation. As a competitive carrier, Acceris Management maintains its book of accounts in accordance

with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP). GAAP is used extensively by interexchange carriers. Moreover, Acceris Management asserts that because it utilizes GAAP, the Commission will have a reliable means by which to evaluate the Company's operations and assess its financial fitness. Accordingly, Acceris Management hereby requests an exemption from the USOA requirements. We grant the Company's request for the reasons stated above.

15. Each telecommunications company certified in South Carolina is required to file annually the Intrastate Universal Service Fund (USF) worksheet. This worksheet provides ORS information required to determine each telecommunications company's liability to the State USF fund. The Intrastate USF worksheet is due to be filed annually no later than August 15<sup>th</sup> with the Commission and ORS.

16. The transfer of assets from Acceris Communications to Acceris Management is approved.



17. This Order shall remain in full force and effect until further notice by this Commission.

BY ORDER OF THE COMMISSION:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Randy Mitchell, Chairman

ATTEST:

\_\_\_\_\_  
G. O'Neal Hamilton, Vice-Chairman

(SEAL)